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BY

ROMYN HITCHCOCK.

From the Report of the National Museum for 1890, pages 417-427  
(with Plates LXXIII).

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## THE ANCIENT PIT-DWELLERS OF YEZO.

By ROMYN HITCHCOCK.

When the first Emperor of Japan, known by the posthumous title Jimmu Tenno, whose traditional reign began 660 B. C., was on his imperial journey eastward from ancient Tsukushi, to establish the seat of government in Yamato, he came to a great "cave" or "apartment", in which eighty *tsuchi-gumo* or cave-dwelling savages were awaiting him. The word *tsuchi-gumo* is usually translated "earth-spiders," but Prof. B. H. Chamberlain regards it as a corruption of *tsuchi-gomori*, or "earth-hiders." Whatever the original meaning may have been, there can be no doubt that it was applied to a savage people, who inhabited Japan before the coming of the Japanese.

The ancient records of the Japanese contain many allusions to these dwellers in caves, or dwellers under ground. In the reign of the Emperor Keiko two Kumaso braves were killed in a cave by Yamato-take. The Empress Jingo Kogo was wrecked among *tsuchi-gumo*. They are said to have been numerous in Bungo and in other western provinces, in Omi, in Yamato, and in other localities.

The character of their dwellings is not clearly defined, owing to the ambiguous meaning of the Chinese character translated "cave." In certain parts of Japan natural caves are numerous, but they are not common throughout the country. Artificial caves are not uncommon, but I have endeavored to show, in an article treating of ancient Japanese burial customs, read before section H of the American Association for the Advancement of Science at Toronto in 1889, that such caves were constructed for interment of the dead and not for dwellings. Still other structures, chambers made by piling up huge rocks and heaping up mounds of earth to cover them, are also numerous in southern Japan, and these have been designated as caves by von Siebold, rather carelessly it seems to me. But these also were only burial chambers. Granting that mere opinions concerning such a subject are not of much value, I would only add that until some stronger evidence than von Siebold has adduced gives color to the idea that the early inhabitants of Japan lived in true caves, I hold that their dwellings were more probably of the character of the pit-dwellings to be described in this article. It is true we do not find the ruins of such







as the extreme end of Kiushiu. Such evidence we find in the distribution of geographical place-names, which are obviously of Aino origin, in the names of famous characters in Japanese mythology, which are certainly of Aino derivation, and in the contents of kitchen-middens or shell-heaps, which are numerous here and there along the coast.

The writer has briefly summarized the evidence of Aino occupancy of Japan in the paper following this one. The character of the pottery found in the shell-heaps is entirely different from any pottery made by the ancient Japanese. The material is the same as that of the Japanese sepulchral pottery, but the shapes of the vessels are not the same and the decoration upon them is absolutely distinctive. Strange as it may seem, the pottery of the shell-heaps is far more elaborately decorated than any ancient pottery of Japanese origin.

Plate LXXIII shows a number of specimens from the large collection of M. l'Abbe Furet, of Hakodate, which I was very kindly permitted to photograph. Many of these are covered with complex designs, such as are absolutely unknown on Japanese pottery. The small fragments representing parts of human figures are, so far as I am aware, unique. Owing to the absence from home of the collector, I was unable to learn anything about them.

The ancient Japanese pottery comes from burial mounds which are prehistoric, or at least which date from a time before the year A. D. 400, when the authentic records of Japan begin. The pottery of the shell-heaps, often designated as Aino pottery, although more elaborately decorated, must be older than this, and it would seem to afford indisputable evidence that the Japanese were preceded by an aboriginal people, who were potters. We find the same kind of pottery in Yezo, in the shell-heaps at Otaru, near Sapporo, on the small island Bentenjima, in Nemuro harbor, about ancient pits in Kushiro, and about similar places on the Island of Yeterof. Associated with it everywhere are found arrow-heads and other implements, such as may be found scattered over many parts of Yezo in the surface mold at the present day.

The question then arises, to what people shall we attribute this spoil? It has been supposed that the shell mounds were left by the Ainos. This is the opinion of Prof. John Milne. But we immediately come face to face with the fact that the Ainos of the present day do not make pottery. The claim is made, upon rather insufficient ground it seems to me, that the Ainos formerly did make pots; but if so, it is strange that in all my journeying among them I found no indications of such handiwork, nor of their need of such utensils. I can not bring myself to believe that a people who not only possessed that useful art, but who also acquired such a degree of artistic skill in decorating their productions, could have absolutely lost it. Certainly it could not have disappeared within a century, as we must suppose if we accept all the evidence we possess of Aino pot making.

It would be a bold assumption indeed to suppose that the dwellers in earth houses, the *tsuchi-gumo*, made the pottery. We have no evidence of this further than the fact that here and there fragments of pottery, and occasionally well-preserved vessels, are found about pits in Yezo and Yeterof, which, as I shall endeavor to show, are probably the ruins of a kind of pit-dwellings corresponding, in the opinion of the present writer, to those of the traditional *tsuchi-gumo*. The pottery is there, and it assuredly was not made by the Japanese. It may be much older than we think, older than the Aino occupancy; older than even the traditions of the Japanese. Whoever were the people who made it, they spread over the whole country from southern Kiushiu to the bleak shores of Yezo and the adjacent islands.

Who were the pit-dwellers of Yezo? I have supposed them to be the *tsuchi-gumo* of tradition, but our only knowledge concerning these is found in the Japanese accounts, unreliable enough, but at the same time not without some bearing on the question. For one would scarcely expect such circumstantial and numerous accounts of meetings and combats with dwellers in burrows or caves to be pure inventions. The word "cave" translated means "apartment." They were not cave-dwellers in the ordinary sense, for in nearly all the accounts of the people they seem to have lived in holes dug in the ground. We have the less reason to doubt this, since it is known that the Smelenkur of Saghalin construct earth-covered dwellings on the sides of hills, not in any sense caves, and houses of another form will shortly be described which may, with still more probability, represent the dwellings of the *tsuchi-gumo*.

Mr. T. W. Blakiston first brought prominently into notice certain remarkable depressions or pits in the ground which he had observed in various parts of Yezo, and which he believed to be the remains of human habitations. In the summer of 1888 I made an extended journey in the island, covering a distance of more than 800 miles on horseback, visiting the Ainos and always looking for pits. The pits are numerous in places, usually on elevated land near the coast, or overlooking the mouths of rivers, presumably that the people might readily sight shoals of fish. The island known as Bentenjima, which forms a breakwater to Nemuro harbor, is covered with numerous pits. Plate LXXIV shows the town as seen from the residence of Mrs. H. Carpenter, a most devoted missionary, and the only foreign resident. The island is seen on the left. Just back of the three sheds or storehouses bordering on the water, where the bank is falling away, there is a small line of white, indicating the remains of a shell-mound. It was at this spot that Prof. John Milne, in 1881, found some fragments of pottery, several arrow-heads, and one complete vase. I was only able to find a few broken shells, not having the means with me for digging.

About 4 miles from Nemuro, in a northeasterly direction, on a bluff overlooking the sea, near the mouth of a small stream, there are seven pits, approximately square in shape, varying in length from 10 to 20





ANCIENT POTTERY FROM M. L'ABBÉ FURET COLLECTION.



feet. They are not well preserved, but it was thought worth while to dig a trench across one of them in the hope of finding some pottery or arrow-heads. The trench was dug two feet wide down to a stratum of clay, but nothing was found.

On the island of Yeterof there are many hundred of such pits on elevated knolls some distance from the coast, but overlooking a broad valley, through which a stream meanders for a long distance nearly parallel to the coast. It seemed to me quite possible that at the time the dwellings represented by these pits were inhabited, the present river valley was an immense arm of the sea, and a rich fishing-ground. It was about these pits that Mr. Blakiston says fragments of pottery were picked up. I was therefore quite anxious to explore one of them with a spade, and leaving my companions, Mr. Leroux and Mr. Odium, I set off in search for a habitation. After a long walk I found an Aino hut occupied by an old woman, and there obtained a dilapidated old Japanese instrument which was used for digging. It was the best the country afforded, so I carried it back and we dug over the whole bottom of the pit, and also in several places outside, without finding a single article to reward us. We made some measurements of the pits in the vicinity, which were large and well preserved. Two pits gave the following results :

Southeast and northwest.	Northeast and southwest.	Depth.
<i>Metres.</i>	<i>Metres.</i>	<i>Centimetres.</i>
4	3.8	53
4	4.5	73

Although I have not yet found a single piece of pottery, nor a chipped flint in any pit where I have dug, it does not follow that nothing of the kind is to be found about them. Other explorers have been more fortunate. The most promising locality for such explorations is at Kushiro, on the southeast coast of Yezo. Only want of the necessary time prevented me from digging about the pits there. In walking over the ground I picked up several small bits of old pottery which the rains had washed out, and the Japanese local officers showed me a small collection of vessels, tolerably well preserved, which had been found there. Some of the Kushiro pits are very large. I measured one, which was 32 feet across and 8 feet deep.

The Ainos have a tradition concerning a race of dwellers under ground called *koro-pok-guru*, who formerly occupied the country. The Ainos claim to have subdued and exterminated them. We have no means of knowing whether this is a genuine tradition, or a late invention to explain the existence of the pits. Presuming it to be the former, it is not unreasonable to suppose that the Aino account of dwarfs, who lived under ground, and the Japanese tales of earth-spiders or



*tsuchi-gumo*, refers to the same people. In the light of the observations related further on, it would also seem probable that the pits of Yezo are the ruins of the dwellings once occupied by them, now affording landmarks whereby we may trace the migrations of a once numerous people to their disappearance and oblivion.

In the year 1878 Prof. John Milne\* visited Shumushu or Peroi Island, the most northern of the Kuriles. There, at the village of Myrup, he found a small colony of migratory people who made huts over excavations. His account of them is short. He writes:

Here there were three wooden houses which had been built by the Russians, and quite a number (perhaps a score) of half underground dwellings. On landing we found that all these were deserted, and in many cases even difficult to find, owing to the growth of wormwood and wild grasses.

The inhabitants of the island, who call themselves Kurilsky, are twenty-three in number. They chiefly live at a place called Seleno, about 4 miles distant. I mention these people, as they seem to be the only inhabitants of the Kuriles north of Iturup (Yeterof).

It appears that the dwellers in the deserted houses were migratory. Professor Milne has elsewhere declared that "these excavations have a striking resemblance to the pits which we find further south."

A Japanese author, Mr. Y. Hashiba, has published a description of some peculiar dwellings built over pits, which he found in Shonai, on the west coast of the northern part of the main island of Japan. I am indebted to Mr. P. Jaisohn for a partial translation of this article, which is written in Japanese. There are two huts, built over circular pits about 1 foot in depth by 2 to 3 yards in diameter. The framework of one is of reeds, that of the other of branches, over which there is a covering of earth 2 feet thick. In the middle of the floor is a triangular fireplace. Other pits were found in the vicinity and fragments of pottery, but the pottery is said to differ from that found in Yezo. The points of difference I have been unable to learn.

The Aleuts build also over excavations in the earth, erecting a framework of wood over which they pile a covering of sods. The entrance to such dwellings is through a low passage along which one must crawl.

When the Japanese obtained the Kurile Islands from Russia in exchange for Saghalin, they determined to transfer the few inhabitants they found there to a more accessible spot. They selected the island of Shikotan, and although the people did not wish to change their abode, a steamer was sent to take them away, and thus a colony of about one hundred persons was established on Shikotan. This island is situated nearly east of the extreme eastern limit of Yezo and south of Kunashiri. It is small, mountainous, not of much importance, and difficult to reach.

Professor Milne was the first to tell me of these people, but he had not seen them. At Nemuro I made inquiries about them and resolved

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\*Trans. Seismological Soc. of Japan, ix, 1886, pp. 127, 128.





VILLAGE OF SHIKOTAN, GENERAL VIEW.





to visit them if possible. My Japanese servant bargained for a native fishing-boat to carry me over, and the lowest price offered was \$30 for the trip. In such a craft the trip would not be without danger, and it might be a voyage of either a day or a week. Fortunately I had already made the acquaintance of two other foreigners who were traveling for pleasure and observation, and as we happened to be together in Nemuro, they had become interested in my proposed visit to Shikotan. But the fishing-boat plan did not seem to be well received by either of them. M. Lerenx, chef de musique at Tokio, one day hailed me on the street with the news that in four days a steamer was going to Yeterof and would stop for us at Shikotan. Mr. Odum, a botanist, joined us, and at 3:45 a. m., on August 9, the Yoshinomaru with her three foreign passengers and a load of salt for the fisheries of Yeterof, steamed from her anchorage in the harbor. I was on deck before sunrise, but already we were out on the heaving water. Toward the south the terraced shores of Yezo could be dimly traced as far as the eye could reach. Toward the north the volcanic range of the Menashi Peninsula was capped with snow. At half-past eight we were abreast of Kunashiri at the point where Chia-chia towers as a regular volcanic cone and slopes on one side in graceful, unbroken concave to the sea. Shikotan had already been sighted and now lay close at hand on the starboard bow, while Yeterof was visible in the distance. But it was noon before we anchored in the harbor, entering through a beautiful narrow passage between high, bold, gray cliffs of sandstone, concealed here and there with patches of green. Within lies a quiet bay with a verdant valley, inclosed on every hand by mountains and brush-covered hills.

The settlement (Plate LXXV) consists of eighteen houses arranged on opposite sides of a single street which runs directly back from the sandy beach. The number of inhabitants is at present uncertain—one informant told us sixty, another sixty-five. They are in appearance a well-formed, hardy people, but they are fast dying off. Subsisting on the most miserable food, bulbous roots, green tops of plants, and a pittance of rice from the Japanese Government; not properly clothed, and unable to obtain the fish and other things which in their native isles were so abundant, disease, especially consumption, has made fearful havoc among them. In five years their number has decreased one-third. The Japanese are now trying to better their condition, but past neglect has done its work. The people can not subsist without aid where they now live, and in any event they will soon disappear from the face of the earth. The picture of the group here shown (Plate LXXVI) is probably the only one ever made of these people. It was taken on the beach just below the Japanese official residence, which is conspicuous in the picture. In the background may be seen many plain slabs marking the final resting-places of many poor souls who succumbed to the privations of a few years in a home not of their own choosing. It will be noticed that the people are clothed in European dress. This is be-

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cause they have so long been under Russian influences. In winter they are accustomed to dress in skins, but whether they are able to provide themselves with such warm clothing from the resources of Shikotan is very doubtful.

The character of the dwellings will be more clearly understood from the illustrations than from any words of description. In a general way it may be said that each dwelling is composed of two parts, a front, thatched house, occupied in summer, and a winter earth house connected with the former by a covered passage.

The thatched house very much resembles the houses of the Ainos. Plate LXXVII represents a view along the village street. There is the low front part used for storage and as a hail or passage-way, and the main portion which constitutes the living room. This room is usually nearly square, with a low door in front and a small door at the back opening into the passage which leads to the winter house. A good general view of a well-made house, and of the passage behind, is shown in Plate LXXVIII. Entering from the front we find in the main room a rude and very dirty floor of boards, raised six inches from the ground, leaving a small inclosed space near the entrance from which one may step up on to the floor. There is a large, rectangular fireplace sunk in the floor about the middle, on which pieces of wood fitfully burn and fill the house with smoke. The rafters and crossbeams are covered with a shiny coating of oily soot. There is a smoke-hole in the roof, but only the excess of smoke escapes. There are usually two small windows, one on each side, perhaps a foot square, and on one side a raised bunk with high side boards.

Above the fire hangs a Japanese iron pot containing a more or less unsavory stew. The pot is coated with accumulated deposits within and soot without, and is probably never washed, if it is ever quite emptied.

Around the walls hang articles of clothing, such as fur-lined gloves and shoes of fish-skin, rude baskets, skins of small animals, strips of hide for thongs, articles of dried fruit, etc.

The winter house is of greater interest, because it probably represents the early pit-dwellings of Yezo. One of my pictures (Plate LXXIX) shows two such houses standing alone. These are at the upper end of the village, and they are the only ones not connected with thatched houses. As will be seen, they are dome-shaped mounds of earth, with windows and a sort of chimney. Usually there is one such mound, sometimes there are two, back of a thatched house, as will be understood by a glance at the next plate, which represents a view of the backs of the houses, showing the earth-dwellings attached.

The mounds are built over shallow excavations or pits in the ground about 12 to 18 inches deep. A plan of one of the dwellings (Fig. 65) shows the approximate size and proportions of the different rooms. The room of the earth-covered house on the left measured 2 metres wide,

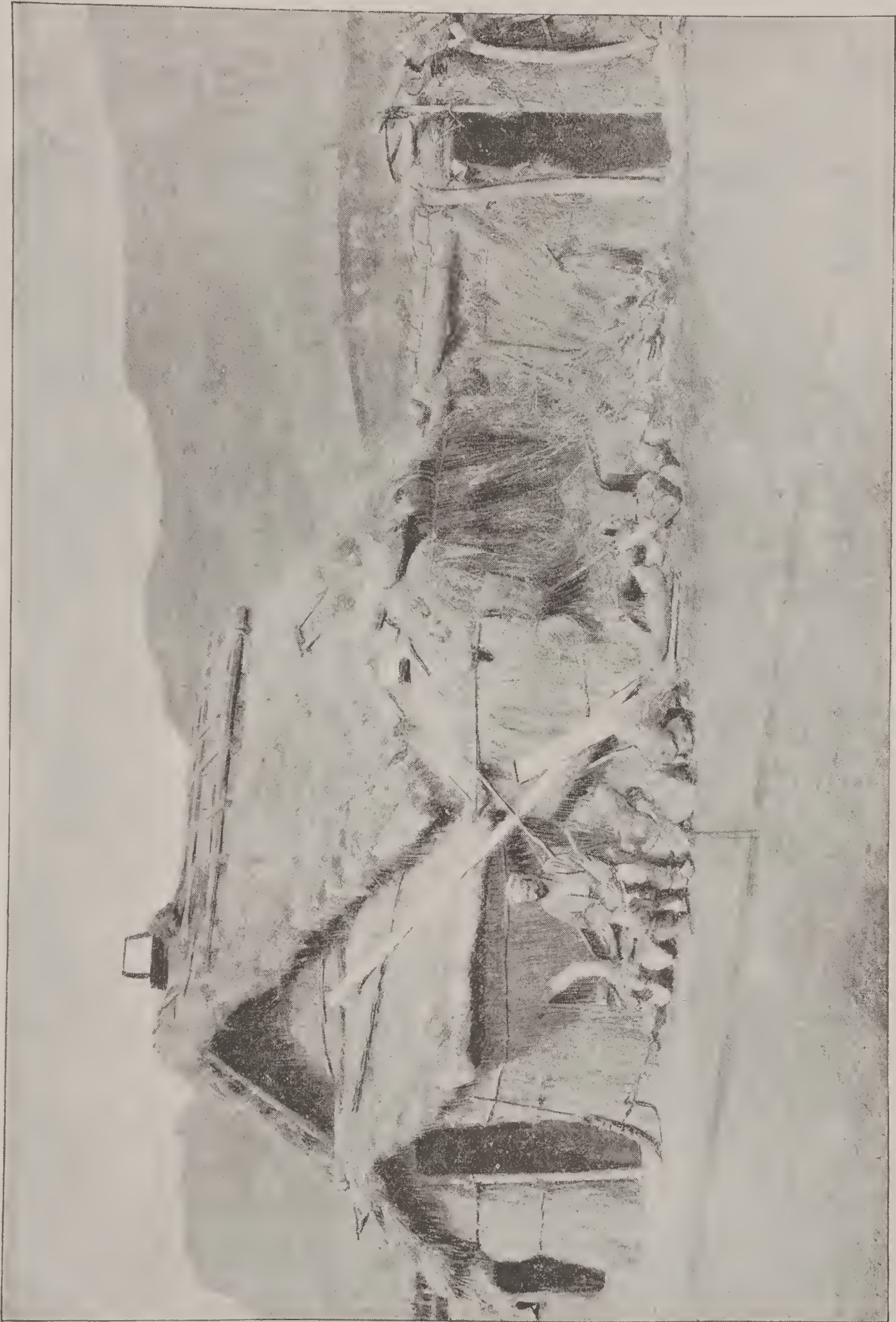




STREET SCENE, SHIKOTAN.







THATCHED HOUSE AND PASSAGE-WAY, SHIKOTAN.







EARTH HOUSES, SHIKOTAN.





2.25 metres deep, and 1.30 metres from the floor to the highest part of the ceiling. The beds were simply bunks, 38 centimetres from the floor and 60 centimetres wide. The entrance is through a small, low door-

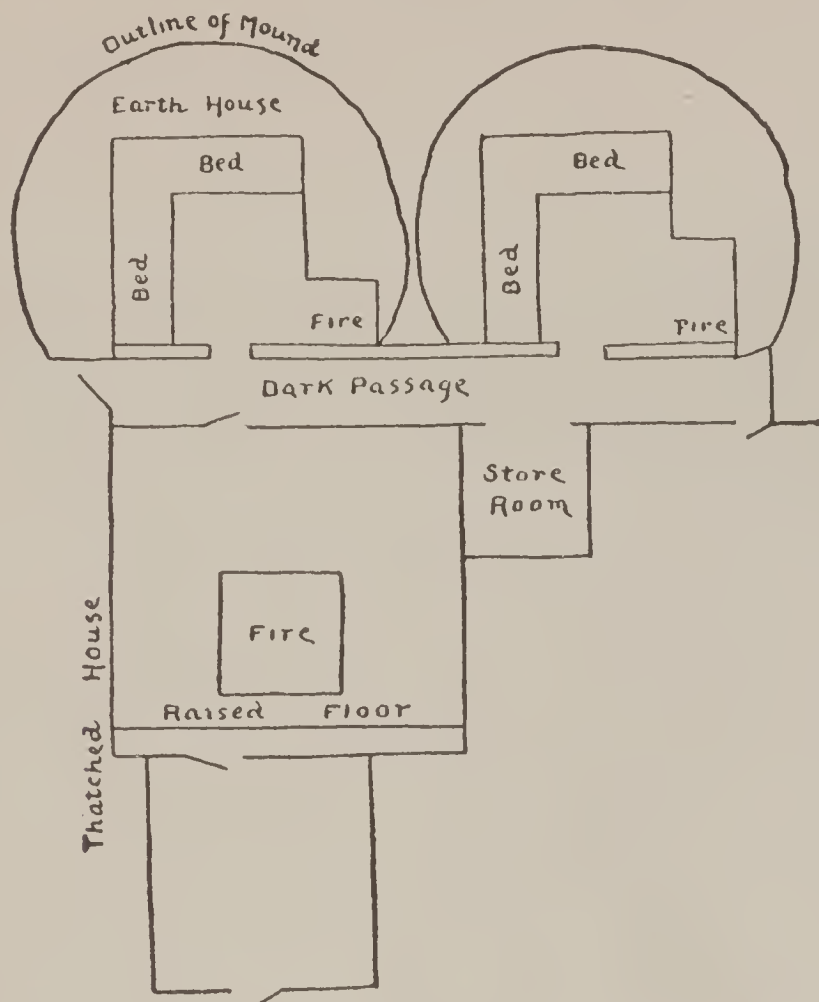


Fig. 65.

PLAN OF DWELLING, SHIKOTAN.

way from the covered passage. This passage may run quite across the back of the thatched house and extend some distance beyond it, as in the house shown in Plate LXXX, which is the one from which the plan is drawn. As one descends into the hut, it seems very damp and gloomy. There is nothing to be seen but the bare floor, the sleeping bunks on the sides, and the fireplace made by piling up rounded stones in one corner.

I have expressed the belief that these Shikotan huts are the modern representatives of the ancient pit-dwellings of Yezo. Perhaps it will be very difficult, or even impossible, to prove this connection; certainly the huts I saw were much smaller than many of the pits of Yezo, but I do not know what kind of a pit would be left by the falling in of one of these houses. I should think, after weathering a few years, it might not be very unlike the pits. On the other hand, it may be that the people, having learned to build better above ground, no longer require such large and deep subterranean huts as in the past, and that these shallow excavations are but survivals of the old plan of construction, which is no longer useful. However this may be, it would seem that the ancient pit-dwellers were driven from Yezo, perhaps by the Ainos, to the Kuriles, for the pits can be traced through Yeterof, and perhaps in the smaller islands beyond. The existence of the pits in Yeterof, the finding by Professor Milne of a small remnant of people

on the same chain of islands who build houses over pits, and the finding of still others on Shikotan, may be fairly taken to indicate a connection between the people who dug the ancient pits and those who live in such dwellings at the present time.

There was very little to collect in the way of specimens to represent the people. M. Leroux was so fortunate as to find a single musical instrument of the form represented in Fig. 66. Not another could be



Fig. 66.

MUSICAL INSTRUMENT, SHIKOTAN.

found of the same shape, which will be recognized as of Russian design. The people were making others of different shape, evidently in imitation of the Japanese *samisen*.

Fig. 67 represents a carrying band used by women to carry their chil-

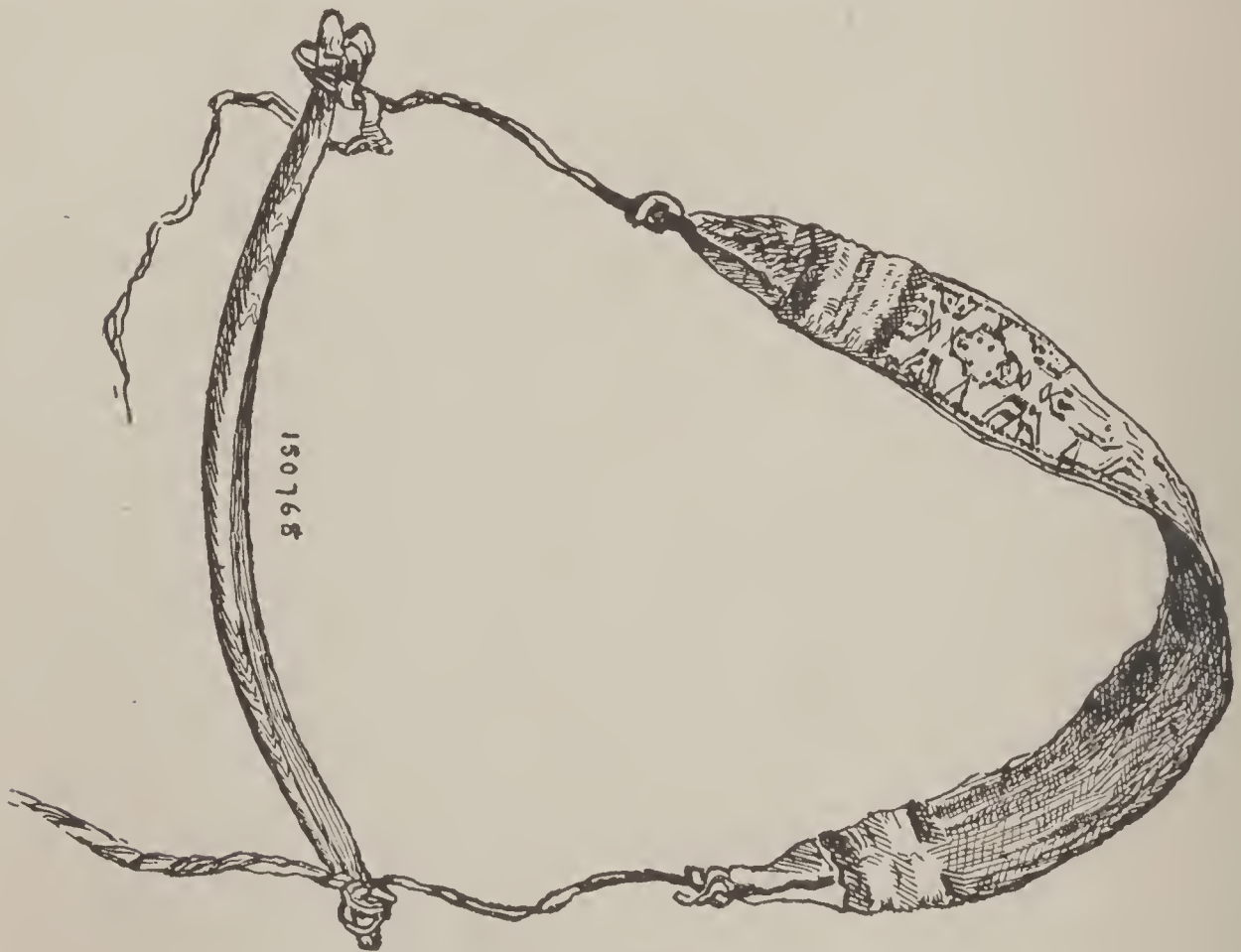


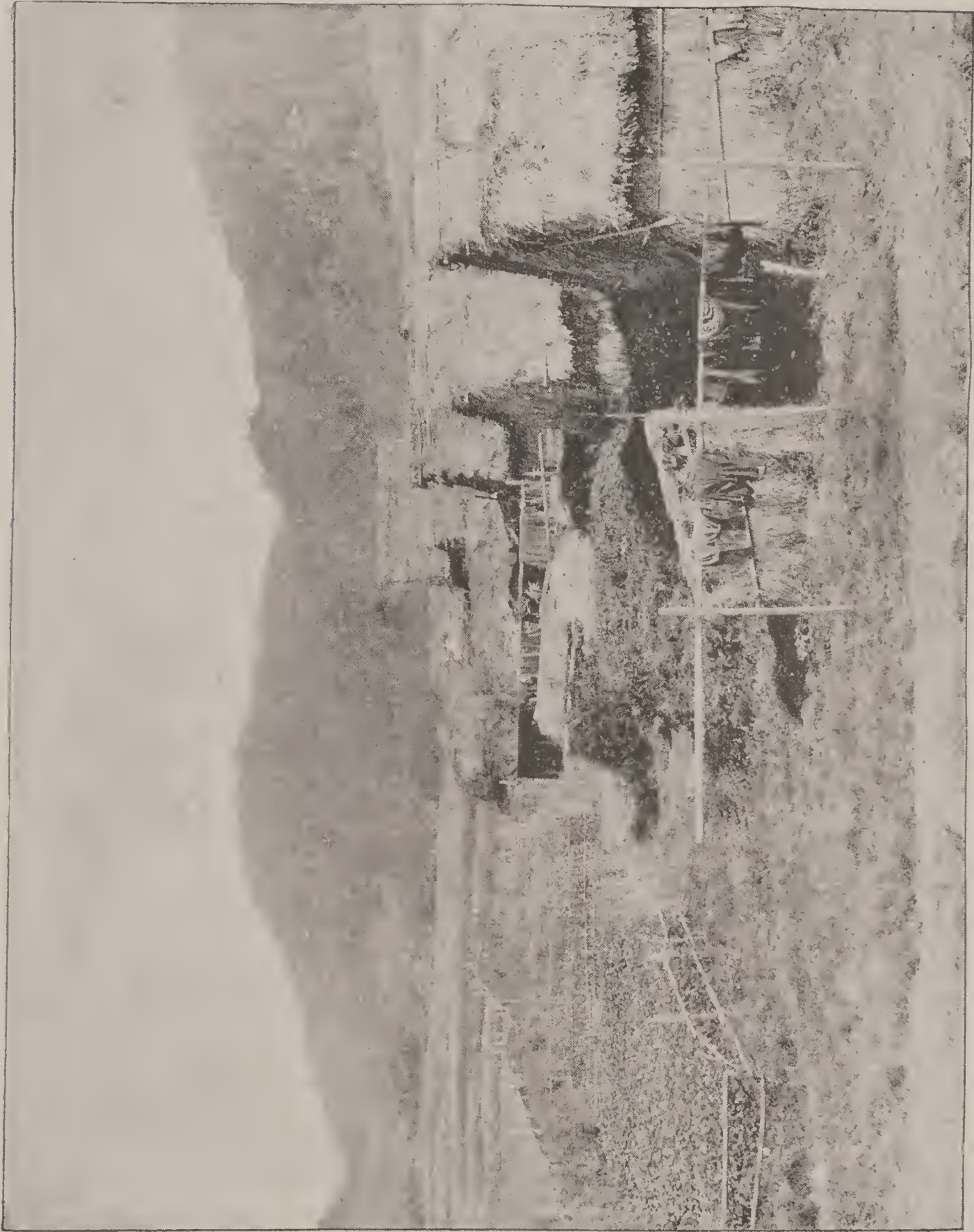
Fig. 67.

CARRYING BAND, SHIKOTAN.

dren on the back. The child sits in a curved wooden seat, and the band is passed over the chest of the bearer.

We left Shikotan towards evening, bound for Yeterof. The rocky bluffs rose clear and sharp behind us, soon to be shrouded in a veil of





VIEW BEHIND HOUSES, SHIKOTAN.





mist, which in this region is constantly forming and reforming with endless changes in the scenery of shore and mountain. Early next morning we arrived at Shiana, a small fishing-station on the island, where a few Ainos and Japanese were found. At noon we were on board ready to start again, when suddenly a dense fog shut in around and held us, damp, cold, and miserable, in the little steamer until midnight. At half-past five the next morning we anchored at Bettobu, where we visited the pits already described, and then returned to Nemuro.













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